




MEMORANDUM

August 27, 2012

TO: Mayor & Council

FROM: T.N. Treschuk, Chief of Police 

VIA: J. Kimball, Acting City Manager

SUBJECT: License Plate Recognition System

As you know the City of Rockville Police Department participates in the Metropolitan Capitol Region License Plate Recognition System Program. Within Montgomery County all police agencies are participants: Montgomery County Department of Police, City of Gaithersburg Police Department, Village of Chevy Chase Police Department, City of Rockville Police Department, and the Takoma Park Police Department.

Here are a few general pieces of information that may be helpful in understanding this system.

WHAT IS THE LICENSE PLATE RECOGNITION SYSTEM?

A License Plate Recognition (LPR) System consists of high speed cameras, combined with sophisticated computer algorithms capable of converting the image of vehicle's license plate into computer readable data. When a vehicle comes into the camera's field of view, a series of images are captured, turned into data by optical character recognition algorithms, and are then run against various databases to, among other things, identify stolen vehicles and vehicles listed to wanted persons. Since the deployment of License Plate Recognition System in Maryland, motor vehicle theft dropped by 31% over the first two years of use in 2008 and 2009 when compared to the statistics of 2007. Actual field experience shows that the License Plate Recognition System is equally effective when it comes to apprehending violent offenders, seizing illegal firearms, and linking suspects to other crimes.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

The system is designed to compare numbers, letters or a combination of numbers and letters to a "Hot List" provided by the State of Maryland. If the LPR finds a "hit," the officer is notified, via the Mobile Data Terminal (MDT) in the officer's patrol vehicle. If the tag that is read is not on

Page 2
August 27, 2012

the “hit list,” it is ignored and kept in the MDT program for thirty days. The LPR system does not “run” these “hits” or other tags through the State of Maryland Motor Vehicle Administration files; they are only compared to the list provided by the state. As we are part of the Montgomery County MDT system, our daily data captured is sent to the Montgomery County Police Department at the end of each tour of duty. The Montgomery County Police Department then forwards this information to the State of Maryland Coordination and Analysis Center (MCAC).

(U) Potential Uses of LPR Data

(U) Identifying the intended uses of LPR data is critical to assessing the privacy impact of the collection, maintenance and dissemination of license plate data. Law enforcement agencies are charged with protecting the public as well as investigating crime and criminal conduct. LPR data can be used:

- In various forms of crime analysis;
- To alert law enforcement officials that a license plate number on a hot list or part of a criminal investigation is found in the database; and
- To identify instances of criminal conduct that might have previously gone undetected without the aid of the LPR system.
- To inculcate or exculpate a suspect, in a specific criminal investigation.
- To assist Homeland Security in tracking the movements of known or suspected terrorists of the United States, and to determine whether a nexus exists between locations visited and potential high value targets.

HOW DID WE GET THESE UNITS AND WHAT DID THEY COST?

The Rockville City Department received three (3) License Plate Recognition Systems through a Metropolitan Region Council Government grant.

WHAT IS THE CITY RETENTION POLICY?

The Rockville City Police Department retains License Plate Recognition information for thirty days (only on the Mobile Data Terminal that is used in conjunction with the License Plate Reader installed on that specific police vehicle). There is no central repository file used by the Rockville City Police Department during this thirty day period. At the end of this thirty day period, the records are erased from the Mobile Data Terminal.

Page 3
August 27, 2012

COMPARATIVE RETENTION POLICIES:

Rockville City Police Department:

Information recorded on the License Plate Recognition System (LPR) is downloaded daily into the Montgomery County Mobile Data Computer Server. There is a thirty day in-house retention where data is stored within the mobile data terminal that was used in conjunction with the License Plate Recognition System installed on a specific police vehicle. Information is automatically deleted at the end of the thirty day time frame.

Gaithersburg Police Department:

Information recorded on the License Plate Recognition System is downloaded daily into the Montgomery County Mobile Data Computer Server. There is a thirty day in-house retention on the Gaithersburg server then it is deleted.

Chevy Chase Village Police Department:

Information recorded on the License Plate Recognition System is downloaded into the Montgomery County Mobile Data Computer Server. There is a thirty day in-house retention and then it is deleted.

Takoma Park Police Department:

Thirty day in-house retention and then it is deleted.

Montgomery County Police Department:

The Montgomery County Police Department retention policy is currently under review and development. Preliminary recommendations include:

- One (1) year online retention
- Records will be archived off-line after one (1) year
- Use is limited to law enforcement

Maryland Coordination and Analysis Section (MCAC)

All LPR system data provided to MCAC is stored on a server separate from all other data used by MCAC for a period of one year. After the one year, the data is purged unless it has become, or it is reasonable to believe that it will become evidence.

Page 4
August 27, 2012

Recently, Council member Moore asked specific questions about the possibility of tagging our data and how the other agencies that receive our information would comply with requests of deletion of the data:

Question #1

Is there a way to tag the Rockville City Police Department's data, and require the other systems to delete our data when we want them to do so?

Answer:

The Montgomery County Police Department has stated that for any information sent to them, although it would be possible for it to be manually deleted upon request, it would be an extremely labor intensive assignment. As to information sent to them which is then sent on to MCAC, we would not be able to recall and delete this information as there is specific policy established by that agency that governs their retention/deletion policy.

Question #2

If Rockville City had a law that said no license plate data collected by the City Police cars could be kept for more than a number of days on any system, how would the County and State police Departments comply?

Answer:

The Maryland State Police does not receive LPR data from any police agency, the data is only provided to MCAC, through Montgomery County.

Presently the Montgomery County Police Department would be unable to comply with the law. Although data is tagged as Rockville City, the system has no ability to assign separate purge dates for specific agencies. The only way to comply would be to prevent the data from being captured on the Montgomery County Police server. This would in essence also prevent data from being provided to MCAC.

Page 5
August 27, 2012

I have attached a bit of information that may be of interest and assistance to the Mayor and Council in review of our current use of the License Plate Recognition System. Much of this information addresses concerns about practices and policy concerning the collection, retention and policies for dissemination of this information by Maryland and National Law Enforcement Agencies.

Attachment #1:

Standard Operating Policy for the State of Maryland Coordination and Analysis Center: Automatic License Plate Recognition Program.

Attachment #2

License Plate Recognition Technology (LPR): Impact Evaluation and Community Assessment, compiled by the Center for Evidence based on Crime Police, George Mason University.

Attachment #3

Privacy Impact Assessment Report for the Utilization of License Plate Readers, complied by the International Association of Chiefs of Police.

Attachment #4

Compilation of Information Maryland Public Information Act requested by the American Civil Liberties Union on any and all information on file with the City of Rockville Police Department concerning the uses of the License Plate Recognition Systems, compiled by the Rockville City Police Department.

Attachment #5

Several news publications concerning License Plate Recognition Systems and their use: *Washington Post*, *Forbes Magazine*, *Government Computer News*.